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ABSTRACT

In 1992, the following competencies were proposed as key employment-related key competencies for vocational education students in Australia: collecting, analyzing, and organizing information; communicating ideas and information; planning and organizing activities; working with others in teams; using mathematical ideas and techniques; solving problems; and using technology. In July 1993, the set of competencies was found to be deficient in not including cultural diversity/understanding and was amended to include cultural understanding as the eighth key competency. Cultural understanding was defined as consisting of knowledge and skills relating to understanding the following: Australia's historical, geographical, and political context; major global issues such as competing environmental, technological, and social priorities; and the world of work and its importance and requirements. The process of formulation and validation of cultural understanding as the eighth key competency included the following phases: a review of the paper at meetings attended by 257 stakeholders for every Australian state and territory and an industry validation process that included input from seven industry groups of diverse size and profile. (MN)

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Cultural Understandings as the Eighth Key Competency

Final Report
to the
Queensland Department of Education
and the Queensland Vocational Education,
Training and Employment Commission

A project managed by the Queensland Department of Education
and the Queensland Vocational Education,
Training and Employment Commission,
for the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training
developed and co-ordinated by
The NLLIA Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture
at the University of Technology, Sydney
and at James Cook University of North Queensland.

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Part 1

A DESCRIPTION OF THE EIGHTH KEY COMPETENCY

1. Introduction

In September 1992 at a joint meeting of the Australian Education Council and Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training (AEC/MOVEET), Ministers received *Key Competencies*, the report of the Mayer Committee set up to develop the concept of employment-related Key Competencies. The development of this concept was recommended in the 1991 Finn report.

The Finn Committee had put forward the design of a 'standard framework' to describe the nature of Key Competencies in the following areas: Language and Communication, Mathematics, Scientific and Technological Understanding, Cultural Understanding, Problem Solving, and Personal and Interpersonal Characteristics.

Following the Finn recommendations, the Mayer Committee identified the following seven Key Competencies:

- collecting, analysing and organising information;
- communicating ideas and information;
- planning and organising activities;
- working with others and in teams;
- using mathematical ideas and techniques;
- solving problems;
- using technology.

At the September 1992 meeting, in the words of the brief for this project, 'Queensland reserved its position on the Mayer set of Key Competencies on the grounds that the set was deficient in not including cultural diversity/understandings. Since that time other State and Territories and industries have undertaken further development activities related to this matter'.

In July 1993, at a further joint meeting of the AEC/MOVEET, it was agreed that the list of Key Competencies be amended by the inclusion of *Cultural Understandings* .

The present project emerged from these discussions. It is managed by the Queensland Department of Education and the Queensland Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission for the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training.

In December 1993 an inter-university research consortium organised by the NLLIA Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture won the contract to add *Cultural Understandings* as the eighth Key Competency. The NLLIA Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture is located at the University of Technology, Sydney, and at the James Cook University of North Queensland.

The consortium also has members from the University of Central Queensland and the CWCC's parent organisation, the Directorate of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia in Canberra. The project also involves key contributions from a broad range of individuals and organisations from all States and Territories. These individuals and organisations were involved in the consultations and validation processes and are listed under Sections 12 and 14 of this report.

2. Project Focus

The Finn Review (1991) identified *Cultural Understandings* as a 'key area of competence' and described it as consisting of knowledge and skills relating to:

- understanding and knowledge of Australia's historical, geographical and political context;
- understanding of major global issues e.g. competing environmental, technological and social priorities;
- understanding the world of work, its importance and requirements (e.g. the role and importance of work at the individual and social levels, the contribution of work to the collective good, and the meaning of social justice within the workplace such as a fair day's work for a fair day's pay) (p 58).

Finn identified Key Competencies as those areas 'related to a young person's initial and lifelong employability' (p. 54) . The present task of developing *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency, therefore, is not to identify all cultural understandings but those understandings related to work.

The Mayer Committee (1992) extended the notion of a Key Competency by an explicit emphasis on the integration of knowledge and skills. A Key Competency involves the application of knowledge and skills in any given situation. It is within this integrated Mayer view of knowledge and skills that *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency has been related to the world of work.

The effect of this integrated approach on the description of *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency has meant that the descriptions have been set within two broad but interconnected features: its generic breadth of application, that is, its applicability to other Key Competencies; and its ability to be defined specifically and have a definite and describable role in work related situations.

Descriptive Features

This report's description of *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency has four integrated features.

The first concerns interrelatedness. Within the global international economy and in the world made small by technology, it is essential that all individuals and groups understand that they are inextricably interdependent on others (whether they be next door or across the world). The Australian workforce consists of diverse cultural groups. This, together with the necessity for Australian industry to become internationally competitive, highlights the need for individuals and groups to value and understand the interrelated cultures that make up Australian society and beyond. It is fundamental that all students have an education where they experience this interrelatedness, to begin to understand, to appreciate and be tolerant of other cultures and to value cultural and linguistic diversity as an inherent feature of Australian society.

A second feature of *Cultural Understandings* addresses both Australia's major social, economic and cultural traditions and how they relate to the workplace, productivity and the economic benefits associated with employment and trade. In this respect *Cultural Understandings* concentrates on the liberal democratic traditions of Australia as well as the historical, economic and political knowledge and skills which should be familiar to all students in order to ensure that they can make a productive contribution to the nation. This feature of *Cultural Understandings* is essential in promoting effective and efficient work practices to enhance Australia's trading position and increase job satisfaction and employability.

A third related feature of *Cultural Understandings* is the process of developing in students and the workforce a sensitivity, empathy and tolerance for others; for example, to be able to take creative and empathetic initiatives within a range of cultural perspectives and different world views. This includes a knowledge of Australia's linguistic heritage and multiple traditions, among which is the contribution by indigenous Australians, so that students learn to value and maintain the benefits of their own heritages which has contributed to this nation's culture and history. This feature enriches the cultural and intellectual lives of individuals, enabling them to fulfil productive civic roles in this country and throughout the world.

A fourth feature of *Cultural Understandings* is to develop in students a critical understanding of the world in which we live. It involves critically analysing this culturally diverse society in terms of equity, equality and social justice, and developing the capacity to take some form of action when social injustice occurs. This entails an ethical perspective in which citizenship responsibilities are acknowledged and maintained.

This approach to *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency has a focus directed at a young person's initial and life-long employability. The major contexts which relate to this focus are: global, community, workplace, educational and training and the sphere of the individual. These five contexts will be described more fully in Sections 5 and 8.

3. Project and Management Teams

The consortium writing this document consisted of the following members:

Dr Bill Cope, Director, the NLLIA Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture, University of Technology, Sydney
Prof. Mary Kalantzis, School of Education, James Cook University of North Queensland
Mr Joseph Lo Bianco, Director, National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, Canberra
Dr Andrew Lohrey, Research Fellow, the NLLIA Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture, Sydney
Dr Allan Luke, Reader in Education, James Cook University of North Queensland
Assoc. Prof. Michael Garbutcheon Singh, Faculty of Education, University of Central Queensland
Ms Nicky Solomon, Research Manager, the NLLIA Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture, University of Technology, Sydney

The consortium also includes the following members as a national consultation team:

Ms Carmela Briguglio, Manager, Western Australian Office of the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia
Ms Louise Finch, Principal Education Officer, Social Education, Northern Territory Department of Education
Ms Maria Issaris, Manager, Personnel Policy, QANTAS Airways
Ms Terry Kessaris, Centre for Aboriginal Islander Studies, Northern Territory University
Mr Rob McCormack, Curriculum Development, Metropolitan Western College of TAFE, Melbourne
Prof. Ian Reid, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Arts, Education and Social Sciences, Curtin University, Perth, and Director, NLLIA Centre for Literacy, Culture and Language Pedagogy
Ms Miriam Rose Baumann, Principal, Francis Xavier School, Daly River, Northern Territory
Ms Elizabeth Sloniec, Curriculum Officer, Multiculturalism in Education, School Education, Department of Education, Employment and Training, South Australia

The Project Co-ordinator was Dr Andrew Lohrey.

The National Management Committee
The National Management Committee consisted of Professor Roger Scott, Robin Sullivan and John Stalker.

Bronwyn Campbell was Executiuve Officer for the project.

The National Reference Group

Chairman
Professor Roger Scott

DEET
Peter Buckskin

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Boni Robertson

National Catholic Education Commission
Kathleen Rundall

National Council for Independent Schools Association
Lorrie Maher

Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee
Simon Marginson

Australian Council of State School Organisations
Joan Brown

National Training Board
Andre Lewis

ACTU
Dr Howard Guille

Australian Chamber of Commerce
John Robinson

Successful Tenderer
Dr Bill Cope, Dr Andrew Lohrey and Assoc.Prof. Michael Singh

Invited Member
John Ingleson

Executive Officer
Bronwyn Campbell

4. The Processes of Consultation, Discussion and Validation

Specific Objectives of this Project
1. To prepare a discussion paper which:

- describes the scope of *Cultural Understandings* as a competency in accordance with the Mayer Committee's broad definition of competence

- describes *Cultural Understandings* in terms of performance levels by establishing three common reference points (Performance Levels 1, 2 and 3) as the basis for assessment and reporting.

2. To consult on the basis of the discussion paper with a broad range of stakeholders.

3. To validate with a representative range of industries the *Cultural Understandings* competency.

This has involved a three-stage process.

1. Discussion Paper
The consortium prepared a discussion paper to describe and explain the *Cultural Understandings* competency, its scope and each of the three performance levels in a format compatable with the Mayer Committee's *Putting General Education to Work: The Key Competency Report*. The discussion paper also included a rationale for the way in which these descriptions and performance levels had been developed.

2. Consultation
This discussion paper was sent to more than 400 stakeholders from every State and Territory in Australia in January and February 1994. Stakeholders were asked to comment on the draft and its relationship to the Mayer Committee's broad conception of competence. Seminars and consultations were held in Darwin, Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart. The meetings were attended by 257 stakeholders, including representatives of industry, unions, schools, state departments of education, training boards, TAFE and universities.

The consortium also met the National Reference Group in Brisbane on two occasions (4 December 1993 and 4 March 1994). The Group comprised State and Territory representatives called together and organised by the Queensland Department of Education and the Queensland Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission. Meetings were also held with the National Management Committee on three occasions (4 March 1994, 31 March 1994 and 18 April 1994).

3. Validation

A third major phase of this project was the industry validation process. Related to these results was an earlier finding that industry considered there was a need for *Cultural Understandings* to be a Key Competency. During the industry validation process for the original seven Mayer Key Competencies, the Australian Centre for Best Practice found that nine industries in four states believed that

> *There was a strong view that cultural understanding should be part of the set of Key Competencies, particularly in the context of cross- or inter-cultural communications.*
> (*Australian Centre for Best Practice, Key Competencies Industry Validation Project, Stage One Report* , May 1993, p. 9.)

The present validation processes followed a series of State and Territory seminars which discussed the draft descriptions of *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency. In March 1994, these draft descriptions were then sent to specific industry groups for response and comment. The industry groups involved in this process were broadly based and represented three specific work sites, three national training councils and the NSW Local Government Industry Training Committee. The industry groups participating in the validation were:

- Public Service (The Australian Taxation Office, Dandenong)
- Transport (QANTAS Airways)
- New South Wales Local Government
- Tourism
- National Textile, Footwear and Clothing Industries
- National Retail and Wholesale Industries
- NSW Community Health Services (St Mary's Community Health Centre)

Major findings

The seven organisations involved in this validation process were extremely diverse in character, size and industry yet were supportive of *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency without exception. The following points represent a summation of their responses:

- Each of the seven organisations considered that *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency was relevant, sometimes highly relevant, to their industry and the future of their industry.

- Five out of the seven organisations have already incorporated or will incorporate various aspects of the *Cultural Understandings* Key Competency into their own industry standards. In one instance, the need to understand cultural diversity has been written into the statutes (the *NSW Local Government* Act 1993).

- The organisations involved in the validation process indicated that the application of the Performance Levels to different industry contexts would occur in different ways according to those contexts. For example, the Australian Taxation Office indicated that they would take a slightly narrower view of 'scope'.

- While all the organisations involved in the validation process considered *Cultural Understandings* to be a very imporant area of competence, some — such as Tourism — considered it absolutely central to their role as an industry.

Section 12 of this report gives more details concerning the responses of individual organisations in relation to their particular industry.

5. *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDINGS

RATIONALE

The success of any organisation or social group — a workplace, a school or a nation — depends on the ability of the members to negotiate the cultural diversity of the group and to have a common purpose. A common purpose can be built and maximised by members using their skills, attributes and experiences to participate in and interact with the different cultures within their group. The cultural diversity of any group or organisation includes ethnic background, religious beliefs, regional differences, languages, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and age.

In the particular case of workplaces, the necessities of increased productivity and world competitiveness have led to a major restructuring of work practices in Australia. Increased participation in a global economy, for example, requires the productive use of the diversity to be found within organisations. This can include the increased creativity in problem-solving that diversity brings to business and educational environments, or the diverse language skills needed to be able to interact effectively with trading partners. Complementing these economic demands are the enormous human benefits that come from an active, informed citizenry producing a cohesive social system. Without competence in *Cultural Understandings*, counterproductive inequities and prejudice can arise. Discrimination in the workplace leads to inefficiency, absenteeism, inflexible work practices and lower productivity. Discrimination in the community leads to public costs and social breakdown.

It is now critical that all students and members of workplaces have the skills required to handle cultural diversity and to be able to negotiate broad cultural contexts so that organisations can maximise the human and linguistic resources of the diverse groups that make up Australian society. It is the role of all sectors of education and training to develop these skills: the knowledge, the attitudes of tolerance and empathy and the practical abilities which will provide the greatest possible opportunity for the individual to succeed in a changing world.

MAJOR IDEAS AND CONTEXTS

The following five contexts are significant in relation to this *Cultural Understandings* Key Competency.

- GLOBAL: The globalisation of the Australian economy involves international trade and cultural relations with the rest of the world and, more immediately, the Asia-Pacific Region.

- COMMUNITY: Effective citizenship and civic responsibility are based on an understanding of the history (including the history of indigenous Australians) and the diverse cultural resources of Australian society. Critical issues involve: access for all Australians to economic, social and cultural resources; reconciliation with Australia's indigenous people; optimal productive use of the cultural and linguistic diversity that is the result of immigration; the learning of languages other than English for their intellectual and international significance; gender equity; and the democratic values of a pluralist society.

- WORKPLACE: Productive workplace cultures depend on shared vision and common purpose. They also involve the continuous negotiation of diversity in their internal functioning and in their interactions with a range of local and international clients. This means that cultural competence is critical, for example, in making the organisation function as an effective and productive unit; in cross-cultural communication; in the use of different forms of communication including languages other than English; and the harnessing of cultural diversity as a resource in the management of an organisation.

- EDUCATION AND TRAINING: All learning takes part within a cultural context. This includes an understanding of Australia's political, social and historical context. In Australia, this learning has to involve the skills and knowledge relevant to the negotiation of cultural diversity. The teaching of languages other than English is also an important aspect in the development of cultural competence. Furthermore, learning about cultural diversity entails the use of varied artistic expressions and forms.

- INDIVIDUAL: Individuals in every society operate from cultural and aesthetic standpoints, work from different experiences applying different skills and display culturally specific attitudes. Each individual, moreover, lives in a number of different worlds according to the different groups, communities, organisations and families in which he/she participates. Dealing with this diversity — the ability to balance conflicting cultural demands and to move from one cultural context to another — is critical for success in work, as well as for social harmony and cohesion.

Three areas of knowledge and skills run across the full range of contexts for *Cultural Understandings*. These areas are developed through each of the performance levels:

- diverse language and communication skills;

- rights and responsibilities;

- community participation and interaction in culturally diverse contexts.

PERFORMANCE LEVELS

Performance Level 1 involves recognising the role of culture in effective social interaction and the practical ways in which one's own and others' attitudes, behaviours, experiences, skills and interests are culturally specific. It also involves using this knowledge to perform team and organisational tasks. Performance Level 2 involves interacting with diverse cultures in order to accommodate and manage behaviour and to negotiate with others in a school, work or community situation. Performance Level 3 involves using culture and diversity as a resource in developing new ways to enhance performance and effectiveness and in taking creative initiatives.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL 1

At this level a person:

- can be sensitive to the main accents, languages and forms of English spoken in the workplace or school and can recognise that effective communication can take place in a variety of ways;
- can demonstrate an awareness of the legal requirements and procedures for non-discrimination and for protecting the rights of self and others; and
- can use knowledge of the historical, civic and cultural development of the Australian nation to undertake practical educational, business and public tasks.

Some applications of *Cultural Understandings* at this level are:

- checking on common meanings by asking questions and listening to answers when giving directions;
- recognising when an interpreter is needed when interviewing or giving instructions;
- not jumping to conclusions about politeness and rudeness when serving an overseas tourist;
- understanding the process of selecting representatives in a school, community or workplace;
- not reacting adversely to the accent of the person in discussions, e.g. an interview or client interaction; and
- taking responsibility for not infringing on the legal rights of others.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL 2

At this level a person:

- can adjust communication, can modify language and actions to accommodate language and cultural differences and can interact effectively using forms of communication which differ according to age, ethnicity and gender, perhaps including some partial facility in languages other than English;
- can advise others on where to seek legal advice and help in relation to their rights and can relate access and equity strategies to work situations; and
- can articulate some of the histories and practices of one's own and other cultures, and apply these to the practical requirements of an organisation and the exercising of civic responsibilities.

Some applications of *Cultural Understandings* at this level are:

- changing procedures in patient care, in order to avoid potential misunderstanding and possible conflict;
- communicating basic information to a culturally diverse public or within an educational institution with some degree of effectiveness;
- participating as an effective member in the processes of selecting representatives in a school, community or workplace;
- encouraging others not to discriminate on the grounds of cultural diversity; and
- sensitively challenging stereotypes and cultural over-generalisations within a group.

PERFORMANCE LEVEL 3

At this level a person:

- can demonstrate a practical facility in a second language or has a refined system of communication tools to meet the requirements of diverse cultural contexts;
- can take an active role in asserting and promoting the legal rights of others;
- can implement strategies for access and equity in the workplace or school and the community;
- can constructively contribute to the creation of new cultural forms and practices in the workplace and the community by using cultural diversity as a resource; and
- can promote the participation of people of diverse backgrounds and experiences in the community or an organisation on the basis of active and informed citizenship.

Some applications of *Cultural Understandings* at this level are:

- an employee of a business initiating public activity by using cultural diversity as a resource, for example: developing a marketing campaign based on the diverse cultural experiences of the members of the organisation;
- a school student effectively voicing their own views while being able to diffuse tensions through familiarity with other cultural groups;
- being an elected representative in school, community or workplace;
- a sports coach exercising a full range of coaching and liaison activities with a culturally diverse team, plus assuming responsibility for international team negotiations;
- developing processes and strategies for avoiding discrimination when elections or public meetings take place; and
- when police or public servants draw up legal documents, organising appropriate and effective use of interpreters for people with non-English speaking backgrounds.

Part 2

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

6. The Context

In recent years, governments, community and industry leaders along with teachers in post-compulsory education have become increasingly concerned about the preparation of young people for the diverse and rapidly changing demands of work. A response to this concern has been that general and vocational education should converge to provide a range of pathways into the workforce and civic participation.

The Finn Report, *Young People's Participation in Post-Compulsory Education and Training* (1991), provided the groundwork and the Carmichael Report, *The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System* (1992), offered an education and training structure to support this convergence.

Both advanced the concept of 'competency' as a way to address the education, training and employment needs of Australians in the context of the restructuring and globalisation of Australian industries. A central component of workforce restructuring is the emphasis on skills development and the need to meet clearly specified industry demands. A competency-based system, developed and managed by educators and industry-based trainers, is a significant national response to this demand.

The Mayer Committee identified seven employment-related Key Competencies to be implemented in the contexts of award restructuring, multiskilling, retraining and micro-economic reform. The purpose of formulating these competency descriptions was strategic, to set an agenda for the reform of education and training which links effectively with the changing character of work, and which engages constructively with the need for equitable access and multiple career pathways.

It is in this context, and consistent with the Mayer Key Competencies framework, that this *Cultural Understandings* Key Competency has been developed.

7. Key Concepts

Key concepts used in this report include:

Competency

Following the Mayer Committee approach of competency, the consortium defined competence in the following terms:

> Competency involves both the ability to perform in a given context and the capacity to transfer knowledge and skills to new tasks and situations. Competence therefore involves the application of knowledge and skills in given situations.

Culture

Culture is socially created forms of human interaction and cohesion. It arises through socialisation and learning; it is neither natural nor fixed. Culture entails multiple personal and social meanings, relationships, practices and values.

There are no fixed boundaries to cultures and cultures are always changing. Any individual lives in and between many different cultures: the culture of the workplace; the culture of educational institutions; culture as ethnic background; culture as aspiration, interest or inclination. In this sense, all our cultures have multiple layers, each layer in a complex and dynamic relation to the other.

Cultural Understandings as a Key Competency involves the effective application of cultural knowledges and skills in any work-related situation.

Cultural diversity describes the differences that mark groups. These include ethnic background, class, gender, socioeconomic status, regional differences, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and age. In education, training and work, these particular elements of diversity have an impact on access and participation and also on economic efficiency and citizenship.

Being able to negotiate effectively the meanings and values of different cultures is a crucial attribute and skill for every workplace. These negotiations often take place on unequal grounds with unequal access to resources.

Competence in *Cultural Understandings* involves effective forms of communication and practical strategies for using diversity as a resource in work, community and learning activities.

Cultural Understandings is not a passive concept involving simply taking in knowledge. An understanding about anything is always part of a skill, ability or stance which a person has developed. Therefore knowledge and skills cannot be separated in any meaningful way for they are integrated aspects of any action and behaviour. *Cultural Understandings* thus consists of the application of knowledge and skills in any given situation, and can be measured through the performance of this competency in given situations. Like other Key Competencies *Cultural Understandings* has three levels of performance.

8. The Scope of *Cultural Understandings*

The *Cultural Understandings* Key Competency sets out to address some of the central ideas and contexts in which there is a focus on cultural diversity, or in which cultural diversity is an important ingredient. The contexts referred to in this competency do not represent a complete list of all possible contexts. Rather they represent a consensus of opinion drawn from the processes of consultation. The five contexts identified are: global, community, workplace, education and training, and the sphere of the individual. Each of these contexts raises a variety of issues that are concerned with the *Cultural Understandings* Key Competency. It is not expected that every industry and every curriculum area in each of the education and training agencies will give equal weight to each of these five contexts. However, it is expected that some aspect of each will be relevant to almost all curricula and training programs.

GLOBAL

The globalisation of the Australian economy involves burgeoning trade and cultural relations with the rest of the world and, more immediately, within the Asia-Pacific region. Issues arising include:

- the use of linguistic and cultural diversity as a resource in international trade, tourism and business;
- the significance of national and international cultural symbols and images, particularly in the service, media and information industries as well as in the more traditional manufacturing sectors;
- internationalisation as a cross-cultural interaction;
- the recognition of Australia's national, economic and cultural place in the Asia-Pacific region;
- the centrality of cultures and languages in the export sectors of the Australian economy and labour market, including inbound tourism and international education; and
- the recognition of the importance of a global perspective for community health, the environment and trade.

COMMUNITY

Community and regional cultures are essential to the question of Australia's nation-building. Community-based institutions, negotiations and identifications are important to evolving notions of citizenship and civic roles. Culture as diversity is a central concept in understanding and participating in the public realm. Effective citizenship and civic responsibility are based on certain fundamental historical and social understandings and a knowledge of anti-discrimination law. This context includes:

- constitutional debates and newly developing notions of citizenship and civic roles;
- an understanding of core Australian social institutions and Australian history, including the history of indigenous Australians;
- the place of Australia's indigenous peoples, reconciliation and the question of land rights;
- racism, ethnocentrism and the place of anti-discrimination legislation;
- social cohesion;
- Australia's place as an Asia-Pacific nation;
- multiculturalism and cultural diversity as fundamental public values;
- the need to develop a sustainable social ecology;
- issues of social equity which redress occupational discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity and Aboriginality.

WORKPLACE

Current management philosophies stress organisational culture as the basis of employee motivation, public image and organisational effectiveness. In the context of a multi-ethnic society and a globalising economy, this means that negotiating cultural diversity at the workplace is more critical than ever. It includes cross-cultural communication, the use of languages other than English and the development of a broader repertoire of language and cultural skills. It also encompasses, for example, harnessing cultural difference as a resource in the management of an organisation, as a means to optimise market reach and as a way of bringing diverse experiences and ways of thinking to work teams. Negotiating cultural diversity also means listening to the cultural preferences of customers. These negotiations encompass cross-cultural client interactions, multicultural and multilingual marketing, and the projection of an organisational image sensitive to cultural diversity.

Issues arising include:

- understanding that all interactions occur in social, historical and cultural contexts and involve dealing with cultural differences, for example, groups and institutions with different collective interests, histories, ways of speaking and ways of viewing the world;
- client and customer interaction involving cross-cultural communication;
- multicultural and multilingual market analysis and sales;
- a public image which is sensitive to the cultural and linguistic diversity of society;

- 'culture' as a critical tool in multiskilling, client interactions and human resource development;
- 'productive diversity' as a management system;
- industrial relations and enterprise bargaining in the context of cultural diversity;
- the importance of different cultural experiences in motivation and performance;
- the significance of Languages Other Than English for dealing with clients and for communicating information within the workplace;
- team building as a process of cross-cultural interaction and as a means of using cultural differences as a resource.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education is becoming more integrated and more responsive to the needs of the community, the workplace, the individual and Australia's place in the world. A convergence is taking place between liberal education and vocational training practices. Part of this shift has been to re-emphasise the concepts of 'context' and the 'interrelatedness' of all things. In relation to *Cultural Understandings* this emphasis represents the acceptance that all learning takes place within a cultural context, involving a recognition and an acceptance of different 'understandings' and perspectives. Learning about cultural diversity also involves aesthetic expressions and artistic forms which create and manifest cultural perspectives. *Cultural Understandings* is therefore a critical competency for all learning.

Issues arising include:

- the integration of educational and training aims and practices with individual, community and workplace needs and aspirations;
- the role of active and informed citizenship in producing social cohesiveness;
- re-emphasis on the concepts of 'context', 'interrelatedness' and contextual learning;
- the development of competency standards in relation to specialised subjects;
- recognising the critical importance of proficiency in Languages Other Than English;
- the place of 'culture' as an aspect of all learning and all teaching;
- the value of pluralism in learning; and
- the role of artistic forms and aesthetic expression in learning about cultural diversity.

INDIVIDUAL

Individuals always operate from cultural standpoints. These standpoints provide shared and different ways of viewing, appraising and analysing the world. Recognising different personal standpoints develops tolerance and empathy for others and is critical, both for an individual's life and for the organisation in which he/she is working.

Issues arising include:

- connecting one's own cultural experience with the mission of the organisation;
- knowing the practical implications of globalisation on everyday work and lifestyle;
- negotiating gender relations, differences of sexual orientation, age, ethnic background, socioeconomic factors and religious background;
- openness to cultural change;
- knowing how to add cultural and linguistic skills to one's existing cultural repertoire; and
- developing an acceptance, tolerance and empathy for the cultural stand-points of others.

9. Performance Levels for *Cultural Understandings*

Each of the Mayer competencies has three performance levels. These levels are described as Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3. Quoting the *Key Competency Report*,

> *The performance levels are standards-referenced; that is, the requirements for achieving each level are specified. Their purpose is to establish and describe what is needed to participate effectively in work.*

These are the three performance levels as defined by *The Key Competency Report:*

> **Performance Level 1** describes the competency needed to undertake activities efficiently and with sufficient self-management to meet the explicit requirements of the activity and to make judgments about quality of outcome against established criteria.
>
> **Performance Level 2** describes the competency needed to manage activities requiring the selection, application and integration of a number of elements, and to select from established criteria to judge quality of process and outcome.
>
> **Performance Level 3** describes the competency needed to evaluate and reshape processes, to establish and use principles in order to determine appropriate ways of approaching activities and to establish criteria for judging quality of process and outcome.

The performance levels of *Cultural Understandings* relate directly to these Mayer descriptions. The nature of this relationship is two-fold. Firstly, the Performance Levels of *Cultural Understandings* are described in terms of three interrelated 'vertical' themes that run through each of the three levels. Secondly, each level refers to an appropriate standard of knowledge, skills and responsibility.

The Themes of the Performance Levels

Three kinds of activity run through each of the three Performance Levels of Cultural *Understandings*. Called 'themes', they have been used in the descriptors of the Performance Levels and also in the example applications of the descriptors. These themes are:

- diverse language and communication skills;
- rights and responsibilities;
- community participation and interaction in culturally diverse contexts.

The three themes were applied in order to:

- provide a focus for assessment of the skills and knowledge that are appropriate to each level; and
- build into the Performance Levels the concept of a progression from Level 1 through to Level 3.

The idea for the three themes developed from the consultation process and the expectations stakeholders had of performance level assessments. These three themes represent the most commonly expected assessment focus as expressed in the consultation seminars.

The first theme is that of developing language and communication skills other than in English. This theme was a major one in all consultations and the importance of it was strongly asserted.

The second theme concerns legal rights and responsibilities as laid down in anti-discrimination and human rights legislation as well as the issue of access and equity. This area of activity had strong support in all seminars.

The third more general theme involves community participation, citizenship and civic responsibilities. This area had strong support in most seminars and particularly from the business community.

The Criteria of the Performance Levels

Each of the three Performance Levels represents the criteria of skill and knowledge applicable to that level. The criteria for each level is established by the application of each of the themes at each level.

Performance Level 1: entails the description of each of the three themes at a relatively straightforward standard so that individuals can meet explicit requirements and make judgments about outcomes against established criteria.

At this first level the skill criteria is assessed in actions that do not culturally offend others. This means that we should not act in a discriminatory way to people because of their ethnic background, gender, religion, age, socioeconomic status and sexual preferences, and so on.

The knowledge component underlying the skill criteria of Performance Level 1 is concerned with identifying and recognising that cultural diversity is a social reality.

In the institutional contexts of workplaces, educational institutions, community groups and government organisations, cultural identification and recognition are a crucial first step towards realising the salience of culture as the basis for all work relationships and the productive value of cultural diversity. It entails an acknowledging that people possess cultural backgrounds, languages and beliefs, and that these backgrounds, languages and beliefs, once identified in their diversity, have value and benefits. It requires a willingness to suspend ethnocentric judgments and stereotyping. It also means recognising the cultural sources and histories of one's own practices, beliefs and actions.

Many forms of gender and ethnic discrimination are based on misconceptions of cultural and linguistic beliefs and practices as products of biological and natural deficiency. A fundamental impediment to effective and collaborative face-to-face relations is a failure to recognise the cultural bases of difference. Cultural 'misrecognition' and prejudice often derive from imagining that one's own cultural group is homogenous and singular. Cultural identification and recognition entail not only a recognition of the specificity of other backgrounds, but also of the hybridity and multiplicity of one's own background.

In a practical sense, the criteria for this level indicate that a person can go into a new social context and be able to recognise and identify the language and cultural factors at play in the context and be able to respond with non-discriminatory behaviour.

In terms of rights and responsibilities, an individual at this level should have a rudimentary but working knowledge of the different legislative requirements in relation to non-discriminatory behaviour.

Finally, at this level it is expected that a person has a basic assessable knowledge of Australian history (including the history of indigenous Australians) and social institutions in order to act and be identified as an involved citizen in the life of the community.

Cultural recognition is not an 'add-on' of knowledge and skills. Rather, this level of competence is a prerequisite to basic participation in all social institutions. If workers, employers, teachers and students are to engage in successful communication, they need to recognise the diversity and legitimacy of others' cultural beliefs, practices and behaviours and to accommodate them in face-to-face interaction. Performance Level 1 sets a baseline for acting and understanding that the differences of others are not idiosyncratic but are a cultural construction. Skills and knowledge that recognise community cohesion are forged through the negotiation of differences.

Performance Level 2: describes the three themes at a level of complexity above the first level in such a way that involves the selection, application and integration of a number of elements.

At this second level, the criteria of skill needed involves a capacity to act so as to challenge discrimination and to interact with and draw upon the variety of skills available in culturally diverse groups.

The knowledge component underlying the skill criteria of Performance Level 2 is concerned with cultural interaction and negotiation. This level of negotiation requires an ability to understand cultural communication styles and patterns of behaviour in order to operate effectively. This ability requires, to quote the Mayer Report's description of Performance Level 2, 'the selection, application and integration of a number of elements' in order to understand that cultural cohesion makes workplaces and other social organisations more effective. It also requires understanding of how multiple and competing cultures come together to undertake group and community tasks.

Languages and linguistic practices vary greatly within cultural and community groups. To interact with this diversity requires more than a recognition of these differences. It requires an understanding of the ways in which cultural and language differences are products of longstanding historical and political contexts, that is, they are dynamic and formed in circumstances which extend far beyond an immediate community or family situation. Performance at this level not only requires that one can recognise diversity, but that one's own behaviour can be modified so as to 'anticipate', 'predict' and 'respond to' the language styles, needs and expectations of others.

In relation to rights and responsibilities, Performance Level 2 criteria require taking action to ensure that others do not act in discriminatory ways. This level implies acting responsibly to assist others in protecting their rights; being able to explain the legal and moral recourse available while appreciating that not everyone feels secure with legal remedies. At this level an individual should be able to act as an advocate for others whose non-discrimination rights have been violated.

Cultural interaction and negotiation also require sufficient involvement and knowledge of the Australian historical and social context to allow active participation and citizenship. Performance Level 2 requires sufficient skill in cultural interaction to be able to apply one's own cultural knowledge and one's own experience to a given context.

Performance Level 3: describes the three themes in terms of an individual being able to take the initiative to reshape processes by using principles to determine appropriate ways of acting.

The criteria of action appropriate for this third level include acting to establish arrangements which use cultural diversity positively to eliminate discrimination within a wide range of groups.

The knowledge component needed in Performance Level 3 is concerned with the ability to recognise cultural diversity yet find a common connection with that diversity. This ability to negotiate cultural diversity while still being able to identify with the individuals who make up different groups is called 'cultural reflexivity'. Cultural reflexivity refers to 'seeing ourselves in others' and involves an empathy for and acceptance of others.

At this level, the individual is expected to take the initiative in relation to cultural diversity and to be able to find a reflection of their own culture in that diversity. This means using culture as a working tool in social and organisational contexts and using cultural diversity as a productive resource. This is a reflexive and dynamic process in which culture and negotiating diversity integrally link self to group or, on a larger scale , connect organisation and community interests.

Cultures and sub-cultures are hybrid, dynamic and shifting and, in modern nation-states like Australia, they are open to continual contact and consequent change. This enables new cultural forms to emerge as groups not traditionally involved with each other come into contact. Such contact occurs most obviously in face-to-face relations in workplaces, educational institutions and communities. It is in these and similar encounters that innovative cultures are created.

Cultural reflexivity means using the diversity of cultural resources — beliefs, experiences, skills, languages and other cultural practices — as a productive resource, both in improving organisational frameworks and in the procedures of everyday institutional life. Cultural resources also have a market value in relations with other institutions and clienteles.

In a practical sense, the individual at Performance Level 3 will have a language or communication facility with which to operate smoothly in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. This means, for example, being able to negotiate inter-cultural contractual obligations in a resourceful manner, or being able to effectively participate in inter-cultural discussions and conferences, and being able to operate as a liaison person in a culturally diverse context such as a union meeting or trade mission.

In terms of rights and responsibilities, the criteria at this level relate to the individual's competence in acting to reform discriminatory systems, protocols, procedures and laws. This could be achieved by drawing on clients' and co-workers' perceptions of these systems and protocols in order to make recommendations and to take action for their reform.

At Performance Level 3 the individual can forge cohesion with diversity by using it as a resource to evaluate, negotiate and achieve common goals. This means that a person can make a constructive contribution to cultural change in a workplace or institution. At Performance Level 3 an individual will also know the historical and social context sufficiently well to be able to influence community attitudes and perceptions.

10. How *Cultural Understandings* is Embedded in the Other Key Competencies

This project's task was to constitute *Cultural Understandings* as a separate and definable eighth area of competence. Yet, by its very nature, *Cultural Understandings* is also embedded in all the other seven areas identified by the Mayer Committee, as is the case with the other Key Competencies.

Regardless of their intention, the competency frameworks which treat cultures as everywhere, tend to recognise them as nowhere. Hence, there is a need for an explicit focus on culture and difference through an eighth Key Competency. For a Key Competency to be a Key Competency, it has to have two broad but integrated features: its generic breadth of application, that is, its embeddedness in other competencies; and its ability to be defined specifically and have a definite and describable role of its own.

This report has dealt mainly with the second of these features of *Cultural Understandings*. The first of these features; the embeddedness of *Cultural Understandings* in the other Key Competencies, is discussed now.

The following represent some of the ways in which *Cultural Understandings* is embedded in the other seven areas of competence:

1. Collecting, Analysing and Organising Information
This activity is not carried out in a social vacuum but is done in either an inter- or intra-cultural context. Responsiveness to the purposes of the information, its sources and to various potential audiences entails cultural negotiations.

All information is filtered through interpretive lenses. Scientists, for example, operate with common ways of interpreting information that require agreed-upon criteria and tests of legitimacy sanctioned by the processes of the discipline and profession, such as explicitness, declaring objectives in advance and replicable methodologies for tests. Not only is there such a thing as scientific culture; there are different ways of approaching human relations with the natural world. That is to say, there are different and competing scientific cultures. Collecting, analysing and organising information is more than a series of neutral procedures.

The collection and organisation of all information is thus a process of selection and combination into culturally appropriate forms. In the case of team information collection, members of a group may anticipate different things and value differently the new information that is produced. Differences in undertaking these activities can be explained in terms of experience, background and interests — by culture, in other words.

2. Communicating Ideas and Information
Effective communication of ideas and information is intrinsically a cultural process, a process using language, the visual and the behavioural to construct and exchange both shared and contested meanings. Crucial factors in all communication are the abilities to use culture-specific codes and conventions and to negotiate cultural contexts, purposes and audiences.

To take language as an example, the use of English as a major world language has given rise to a wide variety of forms of the language. English in its many different varieties functions as the language of a great number of cultures and therefore is used for purposes of communication and group, regional and national identity. It is becoming increasingly important for Australians to know about and accept the varieties of spoken English. At the same time, global economic and media contact have highlighted increased needs for fluency in languages other than English.

3. Planning and Organising Activities
Effectively planning and organising activities within any organisation involves making the culture of the organisation explicit in a very practical sense by planning task-oriented activity, encouraging people's contributions, evaluating different responses. It also commonly involves negotiating differences, since differing cultural motivations, activity structures, ways of organising work and practices come into play.

4. Working with Others in Teams
One of the strong themes in workplace restructuring is developing teams, small groups of autonomous and responsible people who are motivated to succeed at tasks. The notion of workplace culture is essential for successful teamwork. Teams will succeed or fail on the quality of the human interactions among the members and with other parts of the organisation, with clients and with other organisations. Invariably, intra- and extra-team interactions will entail negotiating differences, for example, of age, gender, marital status, sexuality and ethnic or religious background. Efficiently working with others in teams means, therefore, *Cultural Understandings*.

5. Using Mathematical Ideas and Techniques
Mathematics is a measure of quantity and quality. Selecting, applying, judging, interpreting and using mathematical ideas and techniques involves particular learned practices and cultural standpoints towards the world. Different cultures conceptualise, value and structure computational activity in different ways.

6. Solving Problems
Most problems are social in nature. Even technical problems can only be solved in a social context. Problem solving, in other words, is inevitably a cultural process. People also set about solving problems on the basis of different interests and experiences. Problem solving is not a neutral process where, facing any particular problem, there is one correct method to come to a solution or even one solution. Problems can be solved using a great variety of different cultural styles and to different ends. In fact, these differences can be of great benefit if recognised and valued. For example, teams that include members who approach problem solving from different perspectives are more productive and come up with more innovative solutions to problems than teams which are relatively homogeneous in cultural terms.

7. Using Technology
Like the other Mayer Key competencies, *Using Technology* does not happen in a cultural vacuum. The use of technology is always embedded in a cultural context, organisationally and publicly. This area of competence involves interpreting the use, principles and practices of technology and ethical responsibilities, along with social relationships to the natural environment. Different cultural groups

develop distinctive, context-related and viable stances towards technology and its use.

11. The Consultation Process

The consultation process involved circulating a draft report to interested stakeholders and then conducting seminars in each State and Territory. The following comments relate to discussion which took place in those seminars in Darwin, Brisbane, Canberra, Sydney, Perth, Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart.

There was general agreement around the following issues:

- That *Cultural Understandings* should be included as an additional competency. Only a small minority maintained that the issue was adequately covered by the original seven competencies.

- That the language of the document, although similar in difficulty to the original Mayer text, needed to be reworked in order to be accessible to a wider audience.

- That the issues of Languages Other Than English and linguistic diversity were essential to the eighth competency. There was a particularly strong lobby supporting this point of view. The language issues arising in this aspect of the *Cultural Understandings* competency cover such issues as bilingualism, abilities to operate across different contexts, using interpreters and translators effectively and communicating in English with people for whom English is not a first language, and so on. This range of skills does not necessitate full bilingualism, considered by many to be an overly ambitious objective in the short or medium term.

- There was discussion on the possibility of renaming 'Cultural Understandings' as 'Negotiating Cultures'. The starting point of this discussion was the suggestion that the notion of 'understandings' was inconsistent with the broader Mayer agenda. In workplaces, culture is not just a matter of 'understanding', but a means for negotiating goals, actions and relationships. Accordingly, the first draft of this document, as presented in the national consultations, used the term 'Negotiating Cultures' to refer to what had been described as 'Cultural Understandings' in the project brief. In the subsequent consultations, the question of whether the term of 'understanding' was an adequate reflection of the notion of competency was canvassed. Although there was strong support for the idea of 'negotiating' cultures, some people suggested alternative terms to describe cultural performance, such as cultural 'interactions'. In view of the fact that 'Cultural Understandings' was the term endorsed by the Ministers, however, it was decided to put the question of the title of this eighth competency to the National Reference Group. The Group's recommendation was to retain *Cultural Understandings*.

- There was pressure to remove the labels attached to the competency levels in the draft document ('recognition', 'interaction', 'reflexivity') for purposes of consistency with the other Mayer competencies. There was agreement, however, that the principles underlying the level descriptions should be maintained.

- There was an overall concern about the curriculum and assessment implications of the Mayer competencies, but agreement that these were matters for further development as they were in the original Mayer document. It was anticipated that curriculum issues would be taken up as part of an implementation phase and that the current document had a limited brief in exploring these matters.

Debate produced divided opinion on the following issues:

- There was extensive discussion of the adequacy of any definition of culture. This seemed to be more of a problem for academic commentators than for industry, training and school sector representatives.

- There was debate about the categories of 'Scope' as formulated. A number of other formulations was suggested. Different stakeholders emphasised different sites of application (e.g. school curriculum, training board and industry, TAFE frameworks).

- There were concerns about the performance levels and alternative views were canvassed about whether they were too high or too low, whether they fitted together or whether they were ambiguous. It was also suggested that several definite threads should be followed through each of the performance levels.

- Several stakeholders noted that the arts as an industry should be included in the *Cultural Understandings* competency. In stating performance levels, it was argued that an appreciation of different aesthetic traditions needed to be included.

The present document responds to the concerns and questions raised in the following ways.

- The title, *Cultural Understandings*, has been retained.

- A stronger link between language and culture has been made.

- The scope has been modified to represent a balance of economic, educational and private goals.

- A new section has been added, consistent with the Mayer format, which is a three point summary of what the Eighth Competency involves: *language and communication; rights and responsibilities;* and *community participation and interaction*, in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts.

- By following through these three points, the performance levels are defined more clearly and more strongly integrated.

12. The Validation Process

The description of *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency was sent to the industry groups previously listed. Each group was asked to respond to the descriptions in terms of 10 questions that dealt with how relevant and appropriate the competency was to their industry, if the competency could be incorporated into their industry standards, the clarity of the descriptions and examples of specific applications of the competency. Not all industry groups responded to all the questions. However, the information that was given by each group is listed below.

Australian Taxation Office, Dandenong
The *Cultural Understandings* competency descriptions were sent to the Dandenong branch of the Australian Taxation Office which is a regional office servicing the outer metropolitan region of Melbourne. It has 873 employees, 57 per cent female and 43 per cent male; an estimated 70 per cent of employees are from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The ATO Response:

- *Cultural Understandings* is highly relevant to the work of this office and should also be included as a Key Competency for all other government departments, especially those that have significant public contact.

- Some of the values and practices of *Cultural Understandings* descriptions have already been included in core competency standards for the ATO's base to mid-level staff. A proposal was also made to include these values and practices for higher level training programs. The Australian Public Service (APS) core competencies for all levels include some references to cultural diversity and could be improved by reference to this Competency. Further aspects of *Cultural Understandings* have already been incorporated into the industry in the form of EEO policy, Access and Equity policy and various out-reach programs.

- The scope of *Cultural Understandings* is appropriate, although the ATO expressed the wish to make this a little less broad for their purposes.

- The descriptors for the Performance Levels are understandable but probably open to wide interpretation.

QANTAS

The *Cultural Understandings* competency descriptions were sent to the Personnel Office of QANTAS. Relevant information concerning this company is that it has 115 language groups in its Australian based workforce, 37 per cent of the staff have been born overseas and 24 per cent of staff have non-English speaking backgrounds while 50 per cent of QANTAS customers come from non-English speaking countries.

The Response:

- *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency is very relevant to the QANTAS workforce. QANTAS has significant public and customer contact where inter-cultural understanding is necessary. Cultural understanding generally is also relevant to the workforce itself where cross-cultural conflict and misunderstanding can reduce efficiency.

- A variety of activities on cultural diversity have been introduced to the workforce . These include training courses on cultural diversity for leading hands, supervisors and managers. There have also been courses for apprentices on racism issues, courses for Employment Relations Officers on recruitment policies and courses on cross-cultural communication skills for staff.

- To date approximately 1200 staff have been involved in this cultural understandings program.

- The *Cultural Understandings* competency will be mainstreamed into the training affiliated with Award Restructuring.

- The scope of *Cultural Understandings* appears to be appropriate in its application to this company.

- The Performance Levels for *Cultural Understandings* provides a detailed workable model which has not been available to industry before. This model has an application to workplace situations in this company, in such cases as interpersonal, supervisor to employee and organisation to individual communications.

Tourism Training Australia

Tourism Training Australia presented the *Cultural Understandings* competency descriptions to the Australian Hospitality Review Panel for consideration. This panel is a professional body representing a national industry employing more than 420 000 employees. Members of the Panel are the chief executive officers or the heads of the following organisations:

The Australian Hotels Association
The Registered Clubs Association
The Association of Private Hospitality Colleges
The Miscellaneous and Associated Workers Union
TAFE
Tourism Training Australia
The Catering Institute of Australia
The Motels Association.

The Tourism Response:

- The *Cultural Understandings* Competency is highly relevant to the needs of the Australian Tourism Industry, especially in relation to the needs of the many overseas tourists who do not speak English or who have non-English speaking backgrounds.

- Some of the areas of *Cultural Understandings* are already part of the Tourist Industry Competencies. Specific reference is made to cultural understanding in the Standards which relate to 'Participate in Effective Working Relationships' and 'Provide Customer Service'.

- The notion of a Key Competency is very important for the whole industry and will have an impact on future national standards.

- The Performance Levels of *Cultural Understandings* are understandable and the examples help in this regard. There is also a natural progression through the Performance Levels. However, Performance Level 1 is considered to be too high in some contexts. A sound language base in English and communication ability was also a necessary ability.

- New Industry Standards are currently been developed for Hospitality Management and will incorporate the competency of *Cultural Understandings*

New South Wales Local Government

The *Cultural Understandings* competency descriptions were presented to the New South Wales Local Government Industry Training Committee. NSW Local Government has approximately 54 000 employees across the State.

The NSW Local Government Response:

- The *Cultural Understandings* Key Competency is highly relevant to this industry. As a service industry meeting the needs of the residents of each local government area across NSW, the issue of

ensuring that services meet the cultural and linguistic diversity of the state is very important.

- The new *NSW Local Government* Act 1993 has incorporated the need for cultural understandings in the general activity of councils. In the Charter which is to be adopted by each Council it states that the council will have to:

  > *exercise its function with due regard for the cultural and linguistic diversity of its community.*
  > (Ch. 3, 8 (1).)

- The Interim Competency Standards for Local Government in NSW reflect many of the requirements in the *Cultural Understandings* Key Competency. For example, the standards for Children's Services incorporates an anti-bias policy. The Clerical and Administrative Standards incorporate requirements for bi-lingual assistance for customers when required and incorporate language and cultural background as a variable. The unit which deals with 'Care for the Physical Needs of Children' describes how food should be prepared to comply with the cultural and religious differences of families and how the physical needs of children relate also to the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their families. One of the features of the Library Standards is that they require provision of multicultural programs and special needs programs for people of non-English speaking backgrounds.

- The Performance Levels of the *Cultural Understandings* Key Competency are somewhat unclear. When applied to the workplace, a performance level needs to focus on behavioural outcomes.

The National Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industry

The *Cultural Understandings* competency description was sent to the Australian Textile, Clothing and Footwear Industry Training Board (ATCFITB). The chief executive officers of companies and unions involved in the industry are members of the this Board.

The ATCF Industry Response:

- The Key Competency, *Cultural Understandings* , is relevant to this industry. Its importance is due to the very large numbers of people working in the industry with linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds.

- The area of cultural understandings was not specifically considered when industry based standards were being developed. However this industry does have some standards in relation to English as a second language.

- The Performance Levels for *Cultural Understandings* are difficult to align to industry standards and Levels 2 and 3 are too high for this industry.

- Performance level descriptors are understandable but would probably be difficult for TCF operatives.

- There is a natural progression through the Performance Levels, but the examples do not relate specifically to the workplace of this industry.

- The *Cultural Understandings* Key Competency appears to have a bias in favour of educational institutions.

The National Retail and Wholesale Industry

The *Cultural Understandings* competency descriptions were sent to the National Retail and Wholesale Industries Training Council for consideration. This council is made up of 17 national industry representatives and these include:

The Directors of each State Retail Traders Association
Representatives of the Australian Service Union
Representatives of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association
The NSW Chairman of David Jones
The Executive Director of the National Hair and Beauty Association
The Chairman of Woolworths QLD
A representative from the National Hardware Federation of Australia
The Director of the Pharmacy Guild of Australia
The Deputy General Manager HRD Big W
A representative of the National Association of Retail Grocers of Australia

The NRWI Response:

- *Cultural Understandings* as a key Competency is relevant to, and required in, the workplaces of the retail and wholesale sectors.

- It was agreed in principle that there should be a Key Competency called *Cultural Understandings*.

- The descriptions of *Cultural Understandings* should focus on knowledge of the history and the social context of the nation.

- Relating the Performance Levels to the industry was considered to present a challange.

NSW Community Health Services

The *Cultural Understandings* competency descriptions were sent to the St. Mary's Community Health Centre for consideration. This Centre is a Division of the Wentworth Area Health Services.

The St Mary's Community Health Centre Response:

- *Cultural Understandings* as a Key Competency is relevant to the services offered by the Centre, particularly so in regard to the maternity unit.

- The Performance Levels are understandable and are very useful in relation to describing the staff skills needed to deal with patients from non-English speaking backgrounds.

- Some of the skills and attitudes of *Cultural Understandings* are presently being incorporated into the policies and strategies of the St Mary's Community Health Centre. This incorporation is taking place in regard to the use of interpreters by staff, staff attitudes in relation to cultural diversity and staff knowledge of community needs and resources.

13. Examples of the Application of the Performance Levels

Much of the discussion during the consultations revolved around the Performance Levels and how they might work in practice. It was not in our brief to detail the relationship the three Performance Levels would have with respect to a range of industry competencies or to school and training curricula. These connections will be worked out in the future and will be specific to each industry and to the curriculum of each education or training agency. However, given that there was a good deal of concern about this question, it was decided to include some descriptive examples of how performance levels in the area of second languages relate to some workplaces and community sites. The examples were developed by Amanda Macdonald, a PhD student with the Department of Romance Languages at the University of Queensland. The examples are not meant to pre-judge how the *Cultural Understandings* Performance Levels would be applied in any particular area. Rather they serve as a possible guide to how the Performance Levels could, in some instances, be assessed.

LOTE EXAMPLES

The following sets of examples assume that performance in Languages Other Than English (LOTE) occurs across a range of proficiency levels, from basic to highly developed skills, where even basic skills can be both given value and measured. To emphasise this range, the three performance levels have been further broken down into basic and more advanced achievements. Each example is pursued across the levels, giving a flow-through of how a particular job or activity might be performed to a more or less advanced degree in each of the three performance levels.

LEVEL 1

Basic performances

Ex 1: Receptionist in multi-language workplace (e.g. language department, government agency such as Immigration, community legal service, import-export firm): able to distinguish accurately amongst those languages spoken most frequently by telephone callers in order to connect caller with appropriate co-worker (e.g. French from Spanish from Italian; Vietnamese from Chinese; Japanese from Chinese from Korean; Greek from Italian).

Ex 2: Tour guide able to distinguish between most commonly encountered language groups; able to perform basic greetings in a variety of languages and has awareness of potential for differing etiquette sensitivities; knows about basic body-language conventions in some groups (distancing/proximity, some gestures to avoid or employ); has developed some 'all-purpose' means of signalling courtesy and directions independent of specific cultural knowledge.

Ex 3: Sports professional goes overseas on player exchange: is alert to possibility of different methods of training; aware that there may be sensitive ethnic/language divisions within host club; aware that relationship between game and cultural environment may be different. Prepared to adapt to such circumstances. Aware that s/he may be taken as 'typical' Australian. Able to understand some commands in target language and has survival speech skills.

More advanced performances

Ex 1: Receptionist has 'holding' tactics in target language/s; able to say 'Please wait', 'I'll get someone who can speak to you', 'I don't speak X'. Able to understand something of what caller says, such as where calling from, name, perhaps some notion of business.

Ex 2: Tour guide able to perform some courtesies and to give some basic information and directions in target language/s; able to understand some common requests and some forms of distress signal in order to provide services or satisfy urgent needs of those in her/his care; able to draw on interpretative assistance of others in group and listens to and assesses others' attempts to explain.

Ex 3: Sports player able to perform some social interaction, in narrow register range; increased speed at recognising commands; disposes of an array of para-linguistic communication techniques; able to avoid causing offence; able to perform 'survival' tasks with some ease; able to elicit assistance in communication, including securing patient attention.

LEVEL 2

Basic performances

Ex 1: Receptionist able to interact somewhat with caller in target language/s: able to ask basic questions and take basic message; able to communicate basic information to caller; some degree of ease with forms of politeness. Able to perform some basic secretarial functions thanks to acquisition of written skills.

Ex 2: Tourist guide has some conversational skills in target language/s, with some degree of fluency in stock phrases, both speaking and understanding them; able to read understandably from prepared guide screed; a good idea of specific cultural sensitivities and behaviour to avoid offence and create conviviality; able to register suggestions or complaints from tourists and communicate this registering; has client-appropriate strategies for coping with and signalling own deficiencies in language/s.

Ex 3: Sports player has basic conversational language skills and reasonable comprehension skills; able to respond to reasonably complex sports-related instructions; has some familiarity with cultural elements involved in conduct of club life; aware of need for register shifts; able to avoid discriminatory talk within target language.

More advanced performances

Ex 1: Receptionist quite at ease with forms of politeness and efficient in phone-call management; able to understand great deal of typical phone business in target language/s, and to provide fairly full response service in place of specialist co-worker; capable of giving clear explanations and of negotiations concerning appointment times and dates, for example; able to make certain calls; has a degree of independence and large degree of accuracy in written forms for the purposes of typing up letters; able to take some initiative in issuing basic message notes in target language.

Ex 2: Tour guide has some ease in conversation in target language/s, and is quite efficient in standard dialogues; awareness of and some skills in register shift; able to read convincingly from prepared guide screed; able to read spontaneously, particularly handwritten forms; able to figure out and respond, materially if not verbally, to unexpected or urgent requests from tourists; somewhat able to negotiate verbally and explain tour details; able to politely command respect for tour time-tabling.

Ex 3: Sports player has some ease in conversation in target language; able to offer suggestions regarding sports practices and to report on Australian methods; able to respond to technical and strategic questions; able to participate comfortably in social aspects of club life; able to assess contractual conditions applying to self; able to actively resist discriminatory talk current within sports culture; able to resist stereotyping of her/himself and to represent verbally the complexity of Australian identities.

LEVEL 3

Basic performances:

EX 1: Receptionist is very competent in telephone skills in target language/s, able to shift register according to degree of formality of caller's speech; able to make calls with ease; able to speak to co-worker in target language at times where this is useful (e.g. at times when co-worker's English fails, where English is the workplace *lingua franca*); high degree of accuracy in written forms; able to take some initiative in letter composition; able to draw procedural ideas for general use from forms in target language.

Ex 2: Tour guide quite at ease in conversational forms and variety of registers, depending on social background/personal style of tourist; able to perform fairly sophisticated explanations and directions in target language/s; able to understand and respond appropriately to nuanced requests of various sorts; able to interact carefully with tourists' suggestions; able to handle difficult clients politely and effectively; able to read competently in language, particularly hand-written forms; can link aspects of tour with aspects of tourists' culture/s.

Ex 3: Sports player able to speak fluently in a range of registers whether for locker-room or club dignitaries; able to issue complex instructions e.g. strategic and coaching directives; able to understand sophisticated instruction from sports experts; able to relate Australian and host methods regarding sport and connected activities; able to negotiate contractual changes; able to participate in negotiations for other player/coach exchanges and sporting tours; able to work as liaison person between visitors and hosts.

More advanced performances:

Ex 1: Receptionist very competent with spoken forms and able to function in large range of spoken registers; able to perform virtually all spoken, professional tasks in target language as in own language, complementing these with casual skills (e.g. able to perform some entertainment functions); able politely and advantageously to perform switch from, say, English to target language where caller begins in English but has difficulty. Very efficient and accurate in typing written work, able to take a number of initiatives in written form, be these correction of co-workers' errors or generation of letters with little or no supervision. Something like native-speaker competence.

Ex 2: Tour guide able to perform virtually as native speaker; able to provide extra cultural flourishes such as knowledge of appropriate songs, allusions in target language/s; can conduct tour or aspects of tour in manner appropriate to tourists' culture; can appropriately integrate elements of tour procedure from two or more cultural models.

Ex 3: Sports player able to assume full range of coaching and liaison activities, plus some international negotiation functions.

RELATED EXAMPLES

These examples are constructed to exclude LOTE skills from their description so as to focus on the ways in which cultural understandings can work independent of LOTE skills as such. They are, however, examples which seem to work in such a way that it should be clear how the incorporation of LOTE skills at each of the three levels would enhance performance at every stage.

LEVEL 1

Ex 1 (International/Workplace): Municipal gardener, specialising in tropical plants agrees to be sent overseas to instruct peers in sister-city, is aware that language difficulties will exist and prepared to adapt to solutions organised by hosts; prepared to be patient in provision of instruction; makes some basic gestures toward para-linguistic explanation; accommodates efforts by participants to speak her/his language.

Ex 2 (Workplace/Citizenship): English-speaking legal service worker dealing with non-English Speaking Background (NESB): aware of diversity of accents and inter languages in English and able to recognise many of these; aware of diversity of cultural practices and modes of relating to advice-givers, that there will be both cultural constants and individual particularities; able to put clients at ease, answer questions and inform them with simple and reassuring forms of English where necessary, and more sophisticated forms where possible; able to adapt manner of putting questions to clients' capacities in English; able to engage with non-native English without displaying discomfort or impatience; aware that Australian legal rights and responsibilities may not be culturally obvious or readily comprehended by clients.

LEVEL 2

Ex 1 (International/Workplace): Municipal gardener, when meeting and instructing overseas peers, able to perform basic courtesies, 'teacherly' indicators and specialist terminology in host language; has modified own speech to allow for others' difficulties and the type of English they speak; has an array of para-linguistic tools suited to task; able productively to interpret participants' efforts to make themselves understood; able to draw on group's resources to maximise communication; alert to culturally-specific teaching and learning modes; shows awareness of existing task-related knowledge base.

Ex 2 (Workplace/Citizenship): Legal service worker familiar with particular cultural practices concerning information exchange and divulgence in specific client groups, including ethnic, religious and social factors; aware of implications of age and gender in relations with clients and co-workers; aware of particular difficulties client groups may have with Australian legal rights and responsibilities and able to explain these in terms understandable to such groups; able to head off potential misunderstandings or tensions between clients and advice-givers; aware of broad legal practices in principal client cultures; aware of differences within given cultural group and of how to adapt language and behaviour accordingly; able to draw on and adapt experience of bilingual co-workers for interaction with clients; able to redirect clients to other specialised services; able to assist NESB co-workers where help with English language may be necessary.

LEVEL 3

Ex 1 (International/Workplace): Municipal gardener has a refined system of communication tools, incorporating target-culture's specificities; has modified manner of explanation to cater for cultural habits of participants; has developed teaching response to local task-related knowledge base; manages interpreter facilities effectively; has devised ways of inducting participants to useful elements of her/his culturally-specific learning conventions.

Ex 2 (Workplace/Citizenship): Legal service worker has thorough knowledge of particular cultural regularities of range of client groups and subtle understanding of differences within groups; able to liaise between individuals and groups from different backgrounds; able to adapt the organisation of meeting procedure according to participants' cultural habits and expectations, be they co-workers, consultants or clients; able to effectively explain conventional Australian meeting procedure to non-initiates and to help them modify their conduct to conform with that where necessary; able to mobilise interpreter services and other relevant services which may exist for particular ethnic/religious/gender groups; draws on clients and co-workers' perceptions of Australian procedures to make recommendations for reform of protocols and laws themselves; encourages participation of community members as volunteer support workers and in application for jobs at service.

COMMUNITY EXAMPLES

LEVEL 1

Ex 1: Citizen in role as neighbour aware that garden maintenance models are in part culturally determined; has knowledge of basic legal rights and responsibilities regarding non-interference with private property; has basic knowledge of laws regarding watering times and permitted uses of garden; where problem arises, able to explain grievance or respond to grievance politely.

LEVEL 2

Ex 1: Citizen in role as neighbour prepared to accommodate neighbour's gardening practices attitudinal (maintains polite relations despite disapproving of yard use) and physically (accepts minor infringements of property rights for sake of good relations); where problem arises, knows which government body to address for advice or intervention and opts for least confrontational solution first (goes to council in first instance rather than police); able to explain or argue position in way understandable to neighbour in view of language differences and in relation to legal facts; able to explain legal recourse available; able to appreciate that neighbour may feel insecure with legal bodies and will not resort to their intervention lightly.

LEVEL 3

Ex 1: Citizen in role as neighbour able to observe and discuss own and different yard maintenance and gardening practices with developed sense of different traditions from which they arise; modifies own practices to accommodate sensitivities of neighbour or to improve yard maintenance; aware of and able productively to discuss ecological implications of various practices, helping to modify neighbour's practices and allowing own practices to be modified; able productively to discuss meaning and implications of laws bearing on yard maintenance for better neighbourly understanding and interaction with laws.

EDUCATION EXAMPLES

LEVEL 1

Ex 1: School student aware of cultural difference across a number of ethnic groups present in school and has basic knowledge of which groups these are; understands that there are numerous languages spoken within the school and that it is normal for friends from a given language group to speak amongst themselves in that language; understands that English can be spoken with a variety of accents and is prepared to listen to other accents; understands the legal right and obligation of other students to attend that school; refrains from abusive language or actions in relation to other students and may discourage others from doing so.

LEVEL 2

Ex 1: School student attempts to interact with students from other groups and invites their participation in activities; accepts invitations to join activities initiated by member/s of other groups; modifies behaviour to fit in with other cultural styles where appropriate for study or games activities; understands that cultural difference will persist; has some understanding of historical and social forces which have produced situation of particular ethnic groups including own; has appreciation of study difficulties facing other groups and their strengths; has appreciation of cultural nature of particular responses of different groups to education; able to adapt language to suit different styles and capacities in English; aware of need to avoid certain behaviours with certain cultural groups.

LEVEL 3

Ex 1: School student able to modify leisure and study behaviour in light of positive models from other groups and encourage others to do so; able to discuss different practices, both explaining and listening to others' explanations; able to maintain own position without belligerence; able to act to diffuse tension through familiarity with cultural groups; able to judge when humour is appropriate to discuss cultural difference and when not; has good knowledge of particular groups' understandings of their relationship to Australia; is flexible about the way in which s/he identifies self according to situation, understanding that at different times gender or ethnicity or religion or scholastic achievement may be more or less pertinent.

The following people and organisations were represented at the State consultations:

Northern Territory:
Michael Bradley: Principal, Sanderson High School
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John Cossons: Director DEET Northern Territory
Wally Czernezkj: Principal, Casurina Secondary College
Roslind Djuwandayngu: Principal, Milingimbi Community Education Centre
Louise Finch: N T Social Education Curriculum and Assessment
Elsa Gibbon: TAFE
John Hazeldine: Education Arts
Helen Hill: Post Compulsory Secondary Education Curriculum and Assessment
Shantha Jacob: N T Curriculum and Assessment
Wendy Jacob: NT curriculum and Assessment
Wendy Joans: Industry Training Advisory Board. Tourism
Bill McGrath: TAFE Professional Support Services
Jim McMurtrie: Industry Training Advisory Board, Mining
Beryl Mulder: Regional Co-ordinator, Office of Multicultural Affairs
Craig O'Halloran: Industry Training Advisory Board, Retail
Harry Payne: Chairman N T Board of Studies
Brian Robertson: Science Curriculum and Assessment
Anne Wait: N T Language Curriculum and Assessment

ACT
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Elizabeth Allison: DEET
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Paul Costigan: Arts Training
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John Fahy: ACT Department of Education and Training
Caz George: Trades and Labour Council
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